

“Consider the Source”

Based on I Corinthians 12:8-13, James 1:16-18

Offered by Toby Jones to the People of ChxUCC – Sept 13, 2020

The story is told of a convention that was held for all the greatest scientists of the world. The greatest scientific minds from every nation, of every race, color, creed, and age all gathered to celebrate their amazing accomplishments from cloning to landing a vessel on Mars. At the climax of the conference, one scientist stood up and declared, “We have done everything. We have broken every scientific barrier. It is time for us to proudly announce that we no longer need God for anything, for we have become like God, capable of everything that God is capable of!” The proud gathering stood up as one, cheering loudly, and it was decided that a small delegation from the convention would go visit God and let Him know that his services were no longer needed; that God, in fact, had been replaced.

So three of the scientists ascended to heaven and gave God the news. He shook his head in disbelief, as the arrogant scientists informed that he was no longer necessary. “We can do anything you can do. We can even create life and have done so. In fact, we can prove it! We challenge you, God, to a creation contest. We are so certain that we can create a life better and faster than you can, that if we can’t, we promise to return to earth and tell everyone that we still need you and that we all should worship you. The rules of the competition were clarified and just before the bell sounded to begin the competition, God said, “Just one more thing...you guys realize you can’t use any of my stuff, right? All the elements and all the raw materials that I created are off limits.”

The story, of course, illustrates what happens when we fail to consider the Source. The scientists in their eager arrogance had completely lost sight of where – or perhaps from Whom - all the raw materials and all the brain power they’d been using all these centuries had come.

As we move into the second week of our 4-part series on gifts, we would do well to consider the Source of all our gifts. In I Corinthians 12:11, Paul reminds us that “All these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit, Who gives to each of us as God determines.” James, the brother of Jesus, puts it even more bluntly, writing, “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights...”(James 1:16-17) And this is why there is really no room for boasting where our gifts are concerned. The abilities we have, the personality strengths we share with the

world are not our own doing. That's why we call them "gifts:" we have received them out of the gracious hand of a loving God, who calls us each is precious children.

But just as considering the Source of our gifts should keep us from boasting about our gifts, considering the Source of our gifts should also keep us from engaging in false humility or from hiding the gifts we have. As Marianne Williamson reminded us last week in her poem "Our Greatest Fear," our playing small with the gifts God has given us does the world no good, none whatsoever. In fact, one of Jesus's most chilling cautionary tales is the parable of the talents. Remember that one? The master, before he went away for a while entrusted three of his servants different amounts of money. The one took the talent he was given and buried it, only digging it up when the master returned. Not at all what the master had in mind – not for that servant and certainly not for us. All the talents we have – be they traits, abilities, or financial treasures – were given to us in order to be used and used fully for the common good. You don't have to be God to understand how awful it is to give someone a gift and then not have them use it! I remember giving my mother a Christmas gift one year and finding it a month later in a box in the back of our junk closet. Any of us who are parents know how sad and painful it is to discern a gift in our children that goes squandered or unused.

Speaking of unused gifts, I used to have this one dream over and over again. In the dream, I was always in my own house – my actual house – and what would happen is I would somehow discover a door I'd never seen before. I didn't even know it existed. When I opened it in my recurring dream, I would walk into this abundance of space – sometimes multiple rooms – that just amazed me. It would be almost as much space – useable and interesting space – as the rest of the house that I knew about. I'd wander around in awe and think, "how did I not know all this was here?" I would always wake from this dream feeling a little confused and a bit sad. I never could figure out what it was about or what it was trying to tell me, though I had to believe that if I kept having it and remembering it, it was probably pretty important.

Now before I share the fairly recent revelation I had about the dream's meaning for me, let me give you a little background. I grew up in a family of people whose mechanical know-how ended at screwing in light bulbs. My dad barely knew the difference between a Phillips and a flathead screwdriver. He had to call repair folk and carpenters for even the simplest issues around the house. So I naturally assumed that I would be the same way – completely unable to work

with my own two hands. I remember going to friends' houses, even as a child, and seeing their wood shops or tools in use. I loved the smell of freshly sawed wood and newly framed addition. I always envied the kids whose dads could do that kind of stuff, and I further assumed that the kids who grew up in those kind of families would be able to do all that cool woodworking stuff when they had houses of their own. But, as my mother used to say about working with one's hands and doing well in math – "Our family just isn't good at those sorts of things." I believed her and bought into her logic for almost 50 years. It was during the last 10 or so of those 50 years that I would have this dream of the undiscovered parts of my house. Then something happened.

I became the owner of my family's 130-year old cottage in Bay View, and I did so with barely enough money to pay the monthly mortgage on the place. There was literally no money to do any of the necessary updates or maintenance that my parents had let slide for decades. So when Eloise's bedroom began to sag and leak, something had to be done. Then at the encouragement of a good friend in the building business, I just started gutting her room to see what was behind those beaver-board walls. I took it right down to the studs on all 4 walls. I was a little scared, but little by little, I started to figure things out. I bought a few cool tools, face-timed with a few friends when I got into a pickle, but eventually surprised Eloise with a brand-new room. It was amazing how fun and satisfying that process was about 8 years ago. Almost immediately, I wanted to start in on another room. I decided to take on our dreadful and dingy upstairs hallway. I gutted the walls and, again, got right down to the studs. Then I looked up. The ceiling was in worse shape than the walls. Taking out the ceiling on this 2nd floor ceiling scared me. I had no idea what was up there. But suddenly I took my hammer and went after the ceiling...and I couldn't believe what I found. There was a ton of useable space up there. An attic. It needed insulation and some plywood flooring, but there were 3 distinct rooms up there! All through my childhood my parents and siblings complained that there just wasn't any storage space in this old cottage. But no one ever thought to see what was up above the second floor ceiling. Now we've got an access and all the storage space we'll ever need. And guess what...? I haven't had that old dream since.

What I've come to realize, folks, is that that dream wasn't just about a physical house – though it did turn out to be almost literally true where our Bay View cottage was concerned. That dream was about my gifts, my personality, and who God made me to be! God had given me gifts that I was not even aware of! There were things I spent 50 years avoiding, being afraid of, that I'm actually good

at and love to do! I don't know how many more years God is going to give me, but I can guarantee you that I am going to do all kinds of home improvement projects and things with my hands and with wood in the time I've got left.

I made a huge error in the first 50 years of my life. I mistakenly assumed that whatever gifts I had would have to come from my parents – you know, good old genetics. But I forgot to consider the REAL Source – with a capital S; the Giver of all good and perfect gifts! God is the one who gives us gifts and skills, talents and treasures. I should have paid attention to all those childhood experiences and smells when I was around wood and construction projects, when I'd watch friends fix and build things. But I listened to the fear instead. I focused on all the reasons I probably wouldn't be any good at working with my hands.

So what about you? What's keeping you from cutting into the ceiling of your life? What undiscovered rooms might there be in your heart, your mind, your soul, or your house? What's keeping you from trying something new, something you've always wondered about? God is so much greater than you've ever imagined...and so are the gifts that God has entrusted to you. Don't bury them; don't leave them buried! Put them to good and full use, and that includes your financial resources as well. What better thing to invest in at this point in your life than this congregation and its ministries? We have the opportunity to make a huge difference in this community and in our little corner of the world. Why not make this the year that you take the ceiling off of what you pledge to 1st Congregational Church. Don't be afraid. God is good. God is faithful. The more you use your gifts – time, talent, and treasure – the more you'll taste and see that the Lord IS good.

I limited God and what God could do through me for almost 50 years of my life. Then I found out that – just like in his house – in the house of my talents and treasures there are many rooms. The same is true for you. Consider the Source...always remember to consider the Source. Amen.